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AUTHOR Dorr, Aimee; And Others
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ABSTRACT

A previous study of the perceived social realism of television series featuring families was both replicated and extended with a sample of 1692 second, sixth, and tenth graders in 42 schools in southern California. The "Viewing Frequency" instrument and the "Realism" instrument took children 10-15 minutes to complete. Content characteristics were again shown to influence perceived realism by themselves and in interaction with age. Developmental decreases were more likely for more not less realistic content and for more not less general content. A model for developmental patterns in the perceived realism of different types of content was elaborated, and predictors of the television family's general realism were assessed. Findings suggest that children do not generalize much about television reality and do not generalize consistently. (Five tables of data and three figures are included; 48 references are attached.) (Author/MG)

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# Age and Content Influences on Children's Perceptions Of the Realism of Television Families: A Replication and Extension

Aimee Dorr, Peter Kovaric, Catherine Doubleday, and Beth E. Rabin

University of California, Los Angeles

**Running Head: AGE, CONTENT, AND REALISM REPLICATED**

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## About the Authors

**Aimee Dorr** (Ph.D., Stanford University, 1970) is Professor in the Graduate School of Education at the University of California, Los Angeles. Her research interests include children's uses and understanding of television and its social effects.

**Peter Kovaric** (Ph.D., University of Southern California, 1985) is Assistant Research Educationist in the Graduate School of Education at the University of California, Los Angeles. His research interests include children's and families' interactions with electronic media.

**Catherine Doubleday** (Ph.D., University of California, Los Angeles, 1986) is Assistant Research Educationist in the Graduate School of Education at the University of California, Los Angeles. Her research interests include new technologies in education, children's uses of television, and emotional development and socialization.

**Beth E. Rabin** (M.A., University of California, Los Angeles, 1990) is a doctoral candidate in the Graduate of Education at the University of California, Los Angeles. Her research interests include children's learning of social and emotional norms from both live-action and animated programs.

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## Contact

Aimee Dorr, Moore Hall, UCLA, 405 Hilgard Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90024-1521, (213) 825-1838, BITNET ILT3JID@UCLAMVS.

**Abstract**

A previous study of the perceived social realism of television series featuring families was both replicated and extended with a sample of 1692 second, sixth, and tenth graders. Content characteristics were again shown to influence perceived realism by themselves and in interaction with age. Developmental decreases were more likely for more not less realistic content and for more not less general content. A model for developmental patterns in the perceived realism of different types of content is presented. Predictors of the television family's general realism were assessed. It is suggested that children do not generalize much about television reality and do not generalize consistently.

## Age and Content Influences on Children's Perceptions Of the Realism of Television Families: A Replication and Extension

The perceived realism of television content often plays a mediating role between exposure to television content and its social effects (Feshbach, 1972, 1976; Greenberg, 1972; Huesmann, Eron, Klein, Brice, & Fischer, 1983; Lefkowitz, Eron, Walder, & Huesmann, 1977; Noble, 1975; Reeves, 1978). Content that is presented as or judged by viewers to be fantasy or fiction is less likely to influence viewers than content presented as or judged to be reality or nonfiction.

There is ample and consistent evidence that very young children gradually learn that television content is never real in the sense of being real people inside the television set and usually not real in the sense of being live broadcasting or re-broadcasting of real events engaged in by real people in their real-life social roles (see Dorr, 1983; Fernie, 1981; Flavell, Flavell, Green, & Korfmacher, 1990; Hawkins, 1977; Kelly, 1981; Klapper, 1981; Morison & Gardner, 1978; Nikken & Peters, 1988; Quarforth, 1979; Skeen, Brown, & Osborn, 1982 for work in this area). There is conflicting evidence about what else children learn about television reality. What do they learn about how much television content represents what is possible vs. impossible, probable vs. improbable, or characteristic vs. uncharacteristic in everyday life? What do they learn about how to make these judgments for different genres, different types of content, and different depictions of content? Research evidence is incomplete and inconsistent in these areas.

In our earlier work, the perceived social realism of one popular type of entertainment programming, series featuring families with children and adolescents, was studied (Dorr, Kovaric, & Doubleday, 1990). Perceived social realism in that study was operationalized as judgments of the percentage of real-life American families who are similar to a television family on each of several different characteristics. This conceptualization of realism as the degree to which television content depicts the most usual, common, or normative in everyday life is but one of several conceptualizations in the literature (see Dorr, 1983, and Potter, 1988, for two discussions of various conceptualizations). It is simlar to Hawkins' (1977) Social Expectations construct, Potter's (1986) Identity construct, and the construct apparently

underlying some or all of the realism items used in several other studies (Donohue & Donohue,1977; Gadow, Sprafkin, Kelly, & Ficarrotto, 1988; Huesmann & Eron, 1986; Klapper, 1978; Sprafkin, Gadow, & Dussault, 1986; Sprafkin, Kelly, & Gadow, 1987; Watkins, Sprafkin, & Gadow, 1988; Zohoori, 1988). Our operationalization of the construct is, however, much more specific about how subjects should think about the degree of relationship between television content and everyday life (see methods).

Our previous research with second, sixth, and tenth graders using this construct (Dorr et al., 1990) demonstrated that perceived social realism varied according to the content being judged. In line with researchers' perceptions of their accuracy, depictions of television families' feelings were perceived as more realistic than depictions of their actions and demographics. Series featuring families whose structures are more frequent in everyday life were perceived to be more realistic than series featuring families whose structures are less frequent. Differences in perceived realism for these two types of families were large for items assessing the families' demographics (which included structure items) and general realism, and small for items assessing their feelings and actions. Perceived realism judgments were also influenced to some extent by the generality or specificity of content; general realism, the most general construct of the four that were compared, received the lowest perceived realism score.

In the area of age changes in perceptions of the plausibility, possibility, or representativeness of television content, findings from our earlier work provided no support for the occasional report in the literature of increases with age in perceived realism (Klapper, 1981) and conformed to most previous research in suggesting that with increasing age there are either no changes at all in perceived realism (Greenberg & Reeves, 1976; Hawkins, 1977; Klapper, 1981; Morison, Kelly, & Gardner, 1981) or small decreases (Brown, Austin, & Roberts, 1988; Dominick & Greenberg, 1970; Fernie, 1981; Gadow et al., 1988; Greenberg & Dominick, 1970; Greenberg & Reeves, 1976; Huesmann & Eron, 1986; Lyle & Hoffman, 1972a, b; McLeod, Atkin, & Chaffee, 1972; Pingree, 1978; Potter, 1986; Rabin, 1990; Sprafkin et al., 1987; Ward, 1972; Watkins et al., 1988).

We had hypothesized that developmental patterns depended on the specificity or generality of the content being judged. The predicted age by

content interaction was found, but developmental changes in perceived realism were not found for either more general or more specific content. Instead, at each age there was a different ordering for the perceived realism of more general and more specific content. That is, patterns varied by content within age but not by age within content.

The present study was intended to both replicate and extend the earlier work. With virtually identical instruments, a larger sample of subjects with similar demographic characteristics, and a similar set of series featuring families, we expected to replicate the findings for the main and interactive effects of content characteristics on perceived realism and for the lower ratings for general realism as compared to realism of feelings, actions, and demographics. Further, it was predicted that there would again be a significant interaction between age and content characteristics. Because of variations in outcomes, no a priori prediction was made about the likelihood of replicating the previous interaction patterns.

The present research also extended the previous research in three ways. First, it again attempted to identify the characteristics of content that either did or did not produce developmental changes in perceived realism. As in the previous study, the influence of the specificity-generality of the content was examined. Also considered was the overall level of social realism of the content. With the present very large sample size, it was possible to analyze age trends in the perceived realism of single series that differed in their overall realism. It was anticipated that age-related decreases in perceived realism were more likely to be found with less realistic as compared to more realistic family series content.

This hypothesis was based on the proposition that perceived realism is most likely to decline with age (a) when the adjudged content depicts things that could or do occur in everyday life but are not very representative of it and (b) that content is presented in a realistic rather than unrealistic manner (Brown, Skeen, & Osborn, 1979; Skeen et al., 1982). For example, if one is uncertain of the accuracy or representativity of a depiction but it seems possible, then one is more likely to judge it to be realistic if it is presented in live action rather than animation or puppetry or if it contains no supernatural or otherwise impossible family members. Since all the family series included in this study used live action format, had no characters with

superhuman attributes, were placed in settings that exist in the United States, and had story lines that were at least plausible, it was expected that children would tend to judge their content as realistic until they knew quite a bit about what was actually frequent and infrequent in everyday life.

The second extension involved testing one possible explanation for the absence in the previous study of any significant decreases with age in perceived realism. In that study, apparently because of scheduling patterns at the time, the series watched most often by younger children tended to have less traditional structures than those watched most often by older children. Given the two analytic strategies used, this factor could have masked true decreases with age in perceived realism if both younger and older children give lower realism ratings to series featuring less traditional families. This possibility could be tested by comparing realism ratings and age trends for individual series that vary in the traditionality of the family structure. In the previous study, not even two series were popular enough across the three grades to provide adequate sample sizes for such comparisons. In the present study, six series were chosen by large enough numbers of children at each age to permit such comparisons.

The final goal of the present study, and the third extension of the previous study, was to identify the determinants of children's ratings of the general realism of a family series. On their own, children rarely think about television in very general terms; rather they focus on particular characters and their particular actions (Dorr, 1983; Dorr, Graves, & Phelps, 1980; Fernie, 1981; Kelly, 1981; Klapper, 1978, 1981). When children have chosen the content whose realism they will judge, the content tends to be specific, limited, concrete, and even trivial, especially for younger children, but the perceived realism judgments are fairly accurate (Dorr et al., 1980; Klapper, 1981). The content researchers ask children to rate is rarely so specific. Results of our earlier work suggested that different children had different things in mind when they rated the most general item in our instrument and that these things were not exactly the same as the content tapped in any of the 12 more specific items. In the present study, analyses were conducted to identify what it was that determined children's ratings of the general realism of a family series.

In summary, the present study sought both to replicate and to extend findings from an earlier study of children's perceptions of the social realism

of entertainment series featuring families with children and adolescents. Four findings about the effects of content characteristics on perceived realism were predicted to be replicated: (1) Series featuring families with more traditional structures (MTS) will be perceived to be more realistic than series featuring families with less traditional structures (LTS); (2) Perceived realism judgments will vary according to the specific content domain being judged, with feelings judged more realistic than both actions and demographics; (3) Family structure will interact with content domain with the perceived realism of MTS and LTS families being significantly different for demographics, possibly different for general realism, and similar for feelings and actions; and (4) Perceptions of general realism will be lower than those for the realism of feelings and possibly than perceptions of actions and demographics. A further replication was also predicted: (5) Age and content will interact to predict perceived realism judgments. No predictions were made as to whether specific patterns of interaction would be replicated.

The scope of the present study extended beyond that of the previous study in three ways. First, it sought to identify the characteristics of content that either did or did not produce developmental changes in perceived realism. It was predicted that (6) specificity-generality of content will influence developmental patterns of perceived realism and (7) developmental decreases in perceived realism will occur with less rather than more realistic content. Second, it assessed the extent to which the pooling together of different series to create the MTS and LTS groups for each grade and the younger children's tendency to select shows lower in traditionality ranking accounted for the previous finding of few age differences in perceived realism. It was predicted that (8) developmental decreases in perceived realism will be more apparent when children of all ages are rating the same series. Third, the present study examined several possible determinants of children's general realism ratings. No predictions were made.

## Method

### Participants

Participants were 1692 middle class second, sixth, and tenth grade children (see Note 1). The median and modal ages for children in each grade were 7, 11, and 15 respectively, while the ranges were 6 years 7 months to 8 years 6 months, 10 years 7 months to 12 years 6 months, and 14 years 7

months to 16 years 6 months respectively. Children attended 42 schools in Southern California and were approximately evenly divided by grade and sex. Eighty-three percent were European-American, and the remaining 17% were about evenly divided among Hispanic-American, African-American, Asian-American, other, and mixed ethnicity. These children and their parents participated in a larger study for which the data reported here are a subsample. Data collection took place during the 1986-87 school year. All children had parental permission to participate and gave their own informed consent. Except for its size, the characteristics of this sample are virtually identical to those of the previous study.

**Materials**

The *Viewing Frequency* instrument was structured in the same way as the *Viewing Frequency* instrument used in the previous study. It asked children to indicate how often during the last school year they had viewed live action entertainment series featuring families with children and/or adolescents. The six possible frequencies for each network series ranged from "never seen" (1) to "about once a week" (6); for syndicated series which may be broadcast several times a week, a seventh frequency, "a couple times a week (or more)," was added. The list of series was revised at each testing to reflect the complete current broadcast schedule (28-35 series). Four more series names were made up and inserted randomly into the list to help identify children giving random responses. Less than 4% of the children in each grade reported having viewed any of these four series in the past year, the percentage reporting any viewing declined markedly with increasing age, and no child chose these series as one of the two he or she viewed most often.

The *Realism* instrument was virtually the same as the *Realism* instrument in the previous study. Items and their order were identical, instructions were shorter but they conveyed the same messages, and the pool of family series from which two could be chosen for rating was larger with about a 50% overlap with the previous pool. The instrument focused on the two family series that each child selected as those he or she viewed the most. Children could choose from a list of all currently broadcast, live action series featuring families with at least one child or adolescent residing in the family living quarters and with no supernatural or otherwise abnormal entity portrayed as part of the family (e.g., no alien pseudo-children, witch mothers,

or ghost pseudo-parents). The *Realism* instrument was completed twice, once each for the first and second series. It contained 13 items in the four content domains of feelings (4 items), actions (3 items), demographics (5 items), and general realism (1 item) of the series family (e.g., for feelings, "How many real-life families in our country let someone know how they feel in the same way as the television family?"). Conceptually, the four domains differed in their specificity-generality: Generality increased from demographics to actions to feelings, and general realism was much more general than any of these three.

For each item in the instrument, the child indicated his or her estimate of the percentage of real-life American families like the television family by circling one of six boxes (0% to 100% in 20% increments), with the percentage written underneath and that percentage of the box blackened. Average scores were calculated across items in the feelings, actions, and demographics content domains. Cronbach alphas for these scores for each series alone and for the two series together were respectively as follows: feelings (.75, .78, .85), actions (.65, .70, .78), and demographics (.60, .67, .74). Since general realism was assessed by just one item for each series, the Cronbach alpha can only be calculated for the two series combined (.50).

To assess the effect of family structure on perceived realism, series were rank ordered (1 = most traditional structure) following the same procedures as in the previous study (see Dorr et al., 1990 for a detailed description). Briefly, ranking was determined primarily by the number of parents or parent-figures in the household and the basis of their relationship to the children (e.g., biology, marriage, adoption) and secondarily by the employment status of the mother. What was considered more and less traditional or common in American families today was based on data compiled by the Select Committee on Children, Youth, and Families, (1989).

The 16 series included in both the current and previous studies were ordered as in the previous study and the 19 series from the current study were inserted into that order by two researchers who had participated in ranking series in the previous study. They worked independently and resolved disagreements by discussion. Inter-rater reliability, calculated in the previous study as Kendall tau rank order correlations among all pairs of five rankers, ranged from .56 to .81 and averaged .72. In neither study was there any apparent relationship between the ranked traditionality of a series, children

choosing it as their first or second most frequently viewed series, and children completing the *Realism* instrument for it as the first or second series.

**Procedure**

Procedures were similar for the previous and current study except that the total number of instruments, and hence also the total testing time, was smaller in the current study. For this study, children completed 11 instruments at their school in 45-60 minutes. The *Viewing Frequency* and *Realism* instruments took children 10-15 minutes to complete and were administered along with the others in either of two fixed orders designed to assure variety in item and response structure. Within each grade, children were randomly assigned to the two orders.

Tenth and sixth graders completed all instruments on their own in medium to large same-grade groups monitored by one or more researchers. Second graders were tested individually by randomly assigned researchers who read all material out loud while children read along silently and indicated response choices themselves. There were 15 female and 6 male researchers (see Note 2). The ethnic distribution of the researchers was 16 European-Americans, 2 Asian-Americans, and one each African-American, Hispanic-American, and Filipino-American. All were students or faculty associated with the project and were well trained on the instruments and in testing children.

## Results

To test the five replication hypotheses, the same analytic methods were used in this study as in the previous one. Unless stated otherwise, similar methods were used for the three extension topics as well. ANOVAs and MANOVAs used the SAS General Linear Models procedure. For all effects involving grade, Tukey's Studentized Range Test (HSD) with $p = .05$ was used for mean contrasts. Since Tukey's HSD is only appropriate for between-subjects contrasts, for those within-subjects effects involving family structure and content domain, post hoc mean contrasts were conducted using the Bonferroni correction to control for experiment-wise error. The analyses to be reported are based on a very large sample. In some cases very small mean differences are significant. Every significant difference will be reported; however, the magnitudes of differences, as well as their statistical significance, will be taken into account in assessing the findings.

As in the previous study, children were very familiar with the two series for which they completed the *Realism* questionnaires. They reported viewing them nearly every week (scored as 6.0). Although the three grades differed little in the mean viewing rate for their two favorite series ($M$ = 5.88 for second, 6.05 for sixth, and 5.92 for tenth graders), there was a significant effect for grade, $F(2,1623) = 5.90$, $p < .003$, as assessed in a 3 X 2 (Grade X Sex) ANOVA. Using Tukey's Test, sixth graders were shown to view their two favorites significantly more than both second and tenth graders. No other differences were significant. The average viewing frequency for all family series was just a few times in the past year, much less than for the two most watched series for which perceived realism was measured. There were significant differences in viewing frequency of all family series by grade ($M$ = 2.83, 3.35, 3.17 respectively), $F(2,1685) = 63.47$, $p = .0001$, and by sex ($M$ = 3.00 for boys, $M$ = 3.25 for girls), $F(1,1685) = 40.84$, $p = .0001$. By Tukey's Test, sixth graders watched significantly more than did second and tenth graders and tenth graders watched significantly more than did second graders. Thus, there were some small, statistically significant age differences in viewing frequency for the two most watched and for all family series, but all children were very familiar with the two series whose realism they rated.

Over all three grades, 32 out of a possible 35 different series were chosen as one of the two children viewed the most, 29 by second graders, 30 by sixth graders, and 26 by tenth graders. The most frequent was ***The Cosby Show***, accounting for 24% of all choices of series. The next most frequently chosen series were ***Growing Pains*** (11%), ***Family Ties*** (11%), ***Facts of Life*** (7%), ***Diff'rent Strokes*** (7%), ***Silver Spoons*** (6%), and ***Gimme A Break!*** (5%). The remaining 25 series each accounted for less than 5% of all nominations for most frequently viewed series. These findings suggest that many children would not be very familiar with any two series researchers would choose for them to rate.

To test hypotheses involving the family structure variable, two groups of series, more traditional structure (MTS) and less traditional structure (LTS), were created as they had been in the previous study. For the two series selected by each child, the one higher in the traditionality ranking was assigned to the MTS group and the one lower in the ranking was assigned to the LTS group (see Note 3). A 3 X 2 X 2 (Grade by Sex by Family Structure) ANOVA with

traditionality rank as the dependent variable confirmed that series in the MTS condition had families with much more traditional structures than did series in the LTS condition (see Table 1), $F(1,1682) = 2105.88$, $p < .0001$, demonstrating that this assignment method created MTS and LTS groups that were clearly different in the traditionality of family structure. As in the previous study, there was also a significant effect for grade, $F(2,1682) = 99.11$, $p = .0001$, with older children selecting series about families with more traditional structures. This time the grade by condition interaction was also significant, $F(2,1682) = 11.80$, $p = .0001$. The MTS-LTS group difference was significant for each grade separately, and grade differences were all significant within the MTS and LTS groups separately. The interaction is probably best accounted for by the fact that the tenth graders selected series that were more similar in family structure (mean difference = 9.52) than did sixth and second graders (mean differences = 12.14 and 11.57 respectively).

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Insert Table 1 about here

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Since a MANOVA using a sample selected so as to categorize each series as MTS or LTS but not both (see Note 3) and examination of various means using the full sample showed no consistent sex differences, data from boys and girls were combined and hypotheses were tested as they were in the previous study, using a 3 X 2 X 4 (Grade by Family Structure by Content Domain) MANOVA with repeated measures for Family Structure and Content Domain. As predicted, the significant main effects and interaction for family structure and content domain were replicated, $F(1, 1619) = 104.47$, $p = .0001$ for family structure; $F(3, 4857) = 33.26$, $p = .0001$ for content domain; and $F(3, 4857) = 29.44$, $p = .0001$ for their interaction. Exactly as in the previous study, MTS series were perceived as more realistic than LTS series, and feelings were perceived to be more realistic than both actions and demographics, while actions and demographics did not differ (see Table 2).

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Insert Table 2 about here

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In the previous study, the interaction of family structure and content domain reflected the finding that children perceived the MTS group to be significantly more realistic than the LTS group in demographics but not in feelings, actions, and general realism. In the current study, children found MTS series to be significantly more realistic than LTS series in feelings, actions, demographics, and general realism. However, mean differences for MTS and LTS series in each content domain were remarkably similar in the two studies. In the present study, for feelings, actions, demographics, and general realism the MTS and LTS group means differed by .06, .09, .27, and .38 respectively while in the previous study they differed by .02, .11, .24, and .20 respectively. Taking account of the patterns of mean differences in the two studies and the much greater sample size in the present study, the previous findings for the pattern of interaction between family structure and content domain are by and large replicated in the present data.

As shown in Table 2, previous findings of lower perceived realism for more general (general realism) as compared to more specific (feelings, actions, demographics) content were not fully replicated. As predicted, general realism was significantly lower than feelings. Contrary to prediction, it was significantly greater than actions and demographics. There were only small differences in the content domain means for the two studies. For the previous study the four means ranged from 2.31 to 2.53; for the current study they ranged from 2.32 to 2.50. Means for the same content domain differed by a low of .03 and a high of .12. Thus, the disconfirmed prediction arises from small mean differences.

The fifth replication hypothesis of significant interactions between grade and content was supported. Both the grade by content domain interaction, $\underline{F}(6, 4857) = 23.41$; $\underline{p} = .0001$, and the grade by family structure interaction, $\underline{F}(2, 1619) = 4.08$, $\underline{p} < .02$, were significant. Although no predictions were made about whether specific interaction patterns would be replicated, those obtained with the present sample were compared to those from the previous sample. By and large, patterns were replicated.

For the grade by content domain interaction (see Table 3), the range of mean differences between realism judgments for any two content domains within each grade in the present study was very similar in size to that in the previous study. Due to the much larger sample size, more differences were

significant in this study. The greatest difference in the pattern of the means was for the second graders. In both studies, second graders judged feelings to be most realistic and demographics to be more realistic than actions. In the present study, however, general realism was second most realistic while in the previous study it was least realistic. For both sixth and tenth graders, the least and next least realistic domains were the same in both studies while the most and next most realistic domains reversed from one study to the next. Taking account both of the ordering of the means and of the size of mean differences, the extent to which the patterns of the previous study were replicated in this study decreased from tenth to second grade, although at each grade results of the two studies were more similar than different.

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Insert Table 3 about here

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For the grade by family structure interaction (see Table 4), sixth and tenth graders in both studies found MTS series to be significantly more realistic than LTS series. In the previous study, second graders found them equally realistic. In the current study, second graders agree with older children in finding MTS series significantly more realistic; however, the mean difference is considerably smaller for second graders than for older children. Thus, the patterns of interactions in the two studies are again more similar for sixth and tenth graders than for second graders, but overall they are more similar than different.

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Insert Table 4 about here

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As in the previous study, there was a significant three-way interaction between grade, family structure, and content domain (see Figure 1), $F(6, 4857) = 3.25$, $p = .003$. The previous three-way interaction reflected the fact that for feelings, actions, and demographics there were no significant changes with grade for either the MTS and LTS groups, whereas for general realism, grade changes were significant and different for the MTS and LTS groups. The current three-way interaction was quite similar. For actions and demographics, there were again no grade differences for either the MTS or LTS group, and for general realism, the grade changes were again significant

and different for the MTS and LTS groups. As can be seen in Figure 1, the results for feelings were also very similar in the two studies, although some grade differences were significant in the present study. The only real difference in the three-way interaction patterns for the two studies was in second graders' general realism scores for MTS series. These scores were much higher in this study, although the overall developmental pattern was still rather like an inverted U. Thus, the interaction of grade, family structure, and content domain was very similar in the two studies. Developmental changes were small and similar for the MTS and LTS groups for actions and demographics. For feelings, there was some decrease with grade. For general realism, there was a greater decrease. For LTS series, the decrease began in second grade and continued through tenth grade, while for MTS series, the decrease did not begin until sixth grade.

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Insert Figure 1 about here

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In the present study, in contrast to the previous one, there was a significant main effect for grade, $F(2,1619) = 8.80$, $p = .0002$, with perceived realism decreasing with increasing age (see Table 4). Using Tukey's Test, tenth graders' perceived realism is significantly lower than that of both second and sixth graders. Both studies are similar, however, in the small size of the mean differences across grade. In the present study, grade pairs differed by .08 (second versus sixth) and .10 (sixth versus tenth); in the previous study, they differed by .00 and .08 respectively. Thus, the mean differences between grades were only slightly greater in the present larger sample, where they were significant, than in the previous smaller sample, where they were not significant.

Also in contrast to the previous study, the significant grade by content interactions could be explained by significant grade differences within content. Using Tukey's Test for grade differences within content domain, second graders perceived feelings to be more realistic than did sixth and tenth graders and second and sixth graders judged general realism to be higher than did tenth graders. There were no significant grade differences for judgments of actions and demographics. Using Tukey's Test for grade differences within family structure, second and sixth graders found MTS series more realistic

than did tenth graders and second graders found LTS series more realistic than did sixth and tenth graders. In other words, age-related decreases in perceived realism occurred earlier for feelings and LTS series and later for general realism and MTS series, and there were no age-related changes in perceived realism for actions and demographics for either MTS or LTS series.

These findings are relevant to the first issue extending the previous study, identification of the content characteristics that do and do not produce developmental changes in perceived realism. In the previous study, it was hypothesized that the specificity/generality of content would influence developmental patterns. In that study there were no significant grade differences within different types of content. In the present study, there were significant grade differences for general realism and feelings but not for actions and demographics. As noted in describing the *Realism* instrument, general realism and feelings are both more general constructs than are actions and demographics and general realism is a much more general construct than feelings. Thus, the sixth hypothesis was confirmed by the developmental decrease in perceived realism for more general content and the absence of development change for more specific content.

Because of the very large sample in this study, it was possible to use individual series to explore further the relationship between content characteristics and developmental patterns. Six series were chosen by enough children at each grade to permit analysis of developmental patterns. Ranked from most to least traditional, these series were ***Family Ties*** (rank 3), ***Growing Pains*** (rank 4), ***The Cosby Show*** (rank 5), ***Silver Spoons*** (rank 18), ***Diff'rent Strokes*** (rank 21), and ***Facts of Life*** (rank 35). To test the seventh hypothesis that age-related decreases in perceived realism were more likely to be found with less realistic as compared to more realistic content and to further test the sixth hypothesis, two different types of analyses were conducted using data for these six series.

Following the format of earlier analyses, the six series were first grouped by family structure into three MTS and three LTS series and a 3 X 2 X 3 X 4 (Grade by Family Structure by Relative Rank of Series within Structure by Content Domain) MANOVA with repeated measures on the fourth factor was carried out (see Note 4). The relevant findings for testing the sixth and seventh hypotheses are as follows: a significant interaction between grade

and content domain, $F(6, 1384) = 8.00$, $p = .0001$, no significant interaction between grade and family structure, and a significant interaction among grade, family structure, and content domain, $F(6, 1384) = 2.93$, $p = .0076$. The grade by content domain interaction is caused by the absence of grade differences in actions ($M = 2.38, 2.29, 2.38$ for second, sixth, and tenth graders respectively) and demographics scores ($M = 2.34, 2.28, 2.23$ respectively), a significant decrease in feelings scores from second to sixth but not tenth grade ($M = 2.80, 2.41, 2.45$ respectively), and a significant decrease in general realism scores from sixth to tenth grade ($M = 2.59, 2.56, 2.23$ respectively). The three-way interaction, as graphed in Figure 2, again shows more developmental change for general realism and feelings than for actions and demographics, with the number of significant grade differences one greater for MTS than LTS series. These findings provide some additional support for the sixth hypothesis, that developmental patterns will differ according to the generality-specificity of the content whose realism is being judged. Both the pattern of significant grade differences in the three-way interaction (five significant grade differences for MTS series versus four significant differences for LTS series) and the nonsignificant interaction between grade and family structure disconfirm the seventh hypothesis, that age-related decreases in perceived realism would be found for less not more realistic content.

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Insert Figure 2 about here

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The MANOVA analysis using the same six series for all children provided the results needed to address the second extension of the previous study. It showed that the pooling together of different series to create the MTS and LTS groups for each grade and the younger children's tendency to select series lower in traditionality ranking could account for the previous findings of few grade differences in perceived realism. When all children were rating the realism of the same six series, series with which they were all very familiar, there were significant effects for both family structure, $F(1, 694) = 25.96$, $p = .0001$, and relative rank, $F(2, 694) = 3.21$, $p = .04$. Series with more traditional structures were perceived as more realistic than series with less traditional structures, whether they were analyzed by MTS-LTS group or by relative rank within MTS-LTS group. There was also a significant main effect

for grade, $F(2, 694) = 6.89$, $p = .001$, with perceived realism decreasing significantly from 2.53 to 2.32 (see Note 5). The two-way interactions of grade with family structure and grade with relative rank were not significant, although the three-way interaction of grade, family structure, and content domain was significant (see above and Figure 2). For second and sixth graders, the less traditional the structure of a television family the less realistic it is likely to be perceived, no matter what content domain is being measured; for tenth graders, family structure differences occur in the general realism and demographics content domains but not in the feelings and actions content domains. In the analyses involving the whole sample and all series in both this study and the previous one, the younger children's tendency to choose series with less traditional structures than those chosen by older children would mask the developmental changes in perceived realism that appeared in this analysis in which children of all grades are rating the same six series.

The final extension topic was an examination of the predictors of general realism ratings. Data from the two series each child rated were analyzed separately, with the second series considered a replication of the first. Prior to conducting regression analyses, intercorrelations among feelings, actions, demographics, and series traditionality rank were calculated separately for the first and second series for each grade alone and all grades combined. The intercorrelation patterns were similar in all eight analyses. Correlations ranged from -.32 (for series traditionality rank and demographics realism) to .72 (for feelings and actions realism). Given the consistently high correlation of feelings and actions scores (.61 to .72), the average score for all feelings and actions items was calculated and used in the regression analyses.

Four types of predictors of general realism were tested: sex (1 variable), content analysis ratings of the demographic characteristics of the series family (4 variables), content analysis ratings of the relevance and familiarity to children of the series stories and handling of emotions (5 variables), and the children's own ratings of the realism of the series demographics and combined feelings/actions (2 variables). Analyses were run separately for each grade and within grade for the first and second series each child rated. Sex was always entered first. Subsequent variables were entered stepwise with 0.15 significance level selected as the cutoff for variable entry.

Regression equations were significant for all six analyses, with the R-square varying from .16 to .35.

The amount of variance accounted for and the number of predictors entering into the regression equation generally increased as children got older (see Table 5). Sex never predicted more than 1% of the variance in general realism. The first variable selected for entry after sex then accounted for most of the remaining explained variance (from 12% to 26% of the total variance). The children's perceptions of the realism of the family's feelings/actions was the first entered predictor in four equations and the second in the other two equations. Their perceptions of the realism of the family's demographics also entered into all six equations, being first entered twice and second entered twice. In all cases, greater perceived realism of feelings/actions and demographics predicted greater perceived general realism. The content analysis variables representing familiarity/relevance and demographic variables were weaker predictors; they entered equations less than 30% of the time they could have entered. These two sets of variables were also inconsistent predictors both in terms of which variables did and did not enter regression equations and in terms of the direction of prediction, as can be seen in Table 5. There is no obvious explanation for the pattern of results for these two sets of predictors.

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Insert Table 5 about here

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Predictors of general realism were also explored for the six series (described above) which had been rated by many children in each grade. Given the similarity of the findings to those just reported for all series, only the main points will be reported. For each series, two grade contrast variables and a dummy variable for sex were entered altogether first. When the perceived realism scores for combined feelings/actions and for demographics were then allowed to enter stepwise, feelings/actions always entered first, predicted general realism directly, and accounted for 10%-18% of the total variance. Demographics entered the equations for five series, predicted general realism directly, and accounted for another 1-2% of the total variance. Grade and sex accounted for no more than 6% of the total variance for a final R-square between .19 and .30.

## Discussion

This study examined children's perceptions of the social realism of popular television series featuring families with children and teenagers. It was designed to both replicate and extend the findings of our earlier work on the same topic. Virtually identical instruments were used in the two studies, and the samples were quite similar in their demographic characteristics. Data were, however, collected two to three years apart, mostly in different schools and communities and with a different but overlapping menu of family series available for children to view. In addition, the total sample size in this study was nearly four times larger than that in the previous study.

The findings of the earlier study were generally replicated. Three of the five replication hypotheses were completely supported: Series featuring families with more traditional structures were perceived as more realistic than series featuring families with less traditional structures (Hypothesis 1); feelings were perceived as more realistic than actions, demographics, and general realism (Hypothesis 2); and age and content interacted to predict perceived realism judgments (Hypothesis 5). Although all four mean differences, rather than just the predicted two, were significant, Hypothesis 3 was supported by the relative size of the mean differences: The perceived realism of more and less traditionally structured families differed most for their demographics and general realism and least for their feelings and actions.

Only one hypothesis, Hypothesis 4, was disconfirmed: In line with prediction, general realism was lower than feelings; counter to prediction, it was higher than actions and demographics. As suggested in the previous study and confirmed in this one, general realism is a problematic construct. Its conceptual referents for each respondent are less clear than the referents for the more specific constructs of family feelings, actions, and demographics. Given that the series for which children responded in this study are different than those in the previous study and that any aspect of a series could be the determinant of its general realism rating, it is not surprising that a hypothesis focusing on the replication of findings involving general realism would be the one garnering the least support.

Although no predictions were made about the replication of specific patterns of interaction (see Hypothesis 5), the interactions between and

among grade, structure, and content domain in this study turned out to be quite similar to those found in the earlier study. Graphs of the data from the two studies show remarkable similarity in actual scores and in patterns of relationships. There were only two exceptions. First, for series featuring *families with more traditional* structure, second graders in the first study produced much lower general realism scores than did second graders in this study. Second, and again for series featuring families with more traditional structure, tenth graders in the first study produced much higher realism scores for actions than did tenth graders in this study. The first difference is probably explained by the fact that the series put in the more traditional group for second graders were much less traditional (and therefore rated as less realistic) in the first study than in the second. A similar explanation is not possible for the second difference, and we can think of no other reasonable explanation. However, given that the two studies provided 24 points of comparison (created by two family structures, four content domains, and three grades), it is rather more remarkable that 22 of them are similar than that two of them are different.

In this study, as in the previous one, the interactive influences of television content and development on perceived realism were very clear. All interaction terms involving grade and content were significant. In both studies it was predicted that the interactions would reflect the fact that there were virtually no changes with grade in the perceived realism of some types of content and decreases with grade for other types of content. In the previous study, this pattern of results was found, but grade differences were never significant within content. In the present study they were. Analyses of all series children chose and of the six series chosen by many children in each grade both provided evidence that confirmed, disconfirmed, and elaborated the two specific hypotheses about the influence of content characteristics on developmental patterns.

As predicted in Hypothesis 6, the specificity-generality of content influenced developmental patterns. Perceived general realism of family series declined later than did the perceived realism of the family's feelings, while there was no change with grade in the perceived realism of the family's actions or demographics. That is, grade changes were found for more general content (general realism and feelings) and not for more specific content

(actions and demographics). This finding appears to run directly counter to that of Greenberg and Reeves (1976) who reported no change from third through sixth grade in children's judgment of the realism of very general content and declines in two more specific areas. However, Greenberg and Reeves' most specific content (specific, named black characters, families, and police officers) is our most general content (specific, named families), and their age range (third to sixth grade) is a portion of ours (second to tenth grade). Hence our findings do not directly contradict those of Greenberg and Reeves.

While Hypothesis 6, that generality-specificity of content influenced developmental patterns, was confirmed, Hypothesis 7, that developmental decreases would be obtained for less, not more, realistic content, was disconfirmed. There were significant developmental decreases for series featuring families with both more and less traditional structure (respectively more and less realisitic content). The perceived realism of series featuring families with more traditional structure declined later than did that for series with less traditionally structured families. For family series, then, the greatest grade changes can be expected with content that reflects the usual, common, or realistic American family. Apparently, even young children realize that racially and socioeconomically mixed families, single-parent fathers, and other such nontraditional family structures are not very common in the United States. It takes children longer to learn that intact, nuclear families are also not as common as they at first believe.

The several findings about the influence of content characteristics on developmental patterns suggest a general model for age-related changes in children's perceptions of the realism of different types of television content (see FIgure 3). In line with previous developmental findings, the model posits that, when younger and older children differ, younger children find content more realistic than do older children. The general developmental pattern would be a period of greater perceived realism with little or no change in this perception, a period of learning in the particular content domain during which time perceived realism decreases, and a subsequent period of lower perceived realism with little or no change in these perceptions. Not shown in the model, but possible, would be a still later period (during adolescence or adulthood probably) of further decline in perceived realism.

Developmental declines in perceived realism would start earlier and end earlier for more specific content and for less realistic content. They would start later and end later for more general content and more realistic content. This idealized pattern is shown in the top graph of Figure 3. In the middle graph of Figure 3 are smoothed curves of our actual results for more specific (actions and demographics), more general (feelings), and highly general (general realism) content. Except for the fact that the general realism curve is lower than that for the other three content domains the developmental pattern conforms well to the general model. In the bottom graph of Figure 3 are smoothed curves of our actual results for less realistic (less traditional structure) and more realistic (more traditional structure) content. Again they fit the general model well. This model may provide the structure needed to coordinate and make sense of the apparently disparate findings in the literature on the developmental course of perceived realism when realism is conceptualized as representativity, plausibility, and the like.

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Insert Figure 3 about here

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The finding of no grade differences for actions and demographics and of generally lower perceived realism scores for these two content domains supports findings reported earlier (Dorr et al., 1980; Klapper, 1981). In these studies in which children selected the television content whose realism they would discuss and/or provided explanations about the bases for their decisions, even young children made realism judgments that adults considered sensible, correct, or accurate. There was little change with age in perceived realism, but the content about which realism judgments were being made was quite specific, even trivial and mundane. In this study, the actions and demographics items were fairly specific, closer than in most studies to the kinds of content children spontaneously mentioned in the Dorr et al. and Klapper studies. Similar to the findings in those earlier two studies, the perceived realism of actions and demographics was relatively low, and hence probably more accurate, and there was no change with grade in realism perceptions for these content domains.

Analyses of the six individual series judged by many children at each grade confirmed Hypothesis 8. As suggested, younger children's greater

tendency in both studies to watch, and hence rate, series with families with less traditional structures could account for the weak findings related to age change. This would happen if the true pattern were a general decrease in perceived realism with increasing age and if younger children, like older children, gave lower realism ratings to series featuring less traditional families. Analyses showed that younger children did indeed give lower realism ratings to series featuring less traditional families and that, when all children rated the same series, there was a general developmental decline in perceived realism. Thus, developmental effects in both studies were to some extent masked in the primary analyses using whichever two series each child chose.

In this study, as in the previous one, younger children on average chose less traditional family series. However, the disparity between younger and older children's choices was less in this study than in the previous one. The decreased disparity is largely explained by the fact that ***Punky Brewster***, a very nontraditional family series popular with second graders in the previous study, was not being broadcast during this study. As we suggested in the previous study, scheduling, syndication, and casting patterns for family series to some extent structure what children of different ages watch a lot and hence influence which series they will choose to rate for realism.

Developmental differences should not, however, be overly emphasized. Statistically significant grade differences in this study, with the very large sample size of more than 500 children at each grade, were often not large mean differences. Grade differences within particular content areas were larger than grade differences overall, but the range of scores by grade was smaller than the range of scores by content area. The stronger finding in the two studies, in terms of both statistical significance and size of mean differences, is the extent to which the perceived realism judgments of all children between the ages of about 7 and 15 vary according to the content being judged. Yet even the content-driven variations are small compared to what might be expected if a wider range of content had been judged. In this study, children's estimates of the percentage of American families who are like a television family ranged from a low of about 40% to a high of about 55%.

Had the content children judged included other genres, animation, series with supernatural characters or characters with super-human powers, perceived realism would have certainly been lower. The Brown et al. (1979) and Skeen et al. (1982) studies both show clearly that children's perceptions of the realism of television content are influenced by the form in which the content is presented, with live action formats producing judgments of greater realism than animation formats, even with exactly the same characters and story. Recent work on children's reactions to the space shuttle disaster also reported that children's most frequently reported means of deciding whether shuttle disaster coverage was real was by reference to media form cues (Wright, Kunkel, Pinon, & Huston, 1989). Given that the live action series we studied had several form cues that suggest greater realism than would such form cues as animation and special effects, lower realism judgments could be expected with a broader sampling of entertainment-oriented television content. Including yet other types of content, for example that with media form cues suggesting news and documentaries, should produce higher realism judgments than we obtained. Thus the size and range of realism judgments obtained in this study and their developmental course have to be understood in terms of the characteristics of both the content being judged and the content not being judged. A similar point has been made recently by Woolley and Wellman (1990) who demonstrated that "our knowledge of young children's understanding of realities, nonrealities, and appearances is still limited" (p. 946) in part because prior research has not covered the entire range of levels of reality, nonreality, and appearance among which children learn to discriminate.

The meaning of children's general realism ratings continues to be difficult to ascertain. As in the previous study, the standard deviations for this variable were larger than those for feelings, actions, and demographics. This may be due to the fact that general realism was based on responses to two items, while the other scores were based on responses to six or more items. It also may suggest that across children more different referents are being used to decide about general realism than about the realism of more specific aspects of the content. Contrary to inferences made from findings in the previous study, perceived general realism of a television series family is partially accounted for by the perceived realism of the family's feelings, actions, and

demographics. In fact, these perceptions are consistently the best predictors of perceived general realism for second, sixth, and tenth graders alike. Adult content analysts' judgments of the demographic characteristics of the series family and of the familiarity and relevance of the plots and emotions to children are weak predictors of perceived general realism. It is intuitively appealing to conclude that children's judgments about the social realism of specific aspects of a family series would predict their judgments of its general realism. However, this finding could be due more to the common measurement method in these variables than to what they were intended to measure. Furthermore, even these variables account for but a small proportion of the variability in general realism. Others have reported inconsistencies in children's realism judgments for content at different levels of generality (Brown et al., 1979; Klapper, 1981; Skeen et al., 1982; Watkins et al., 1988). Klapper (1981, p. 79) puts it succinctly: "Children of these ages [second and fifth grades] do *not* perceive televised fiction as being inherently or consistently realistic or unrealistic. The children instead judge separate bits individually. Thus, one cannot validly generalize from the perceived realism of one element to another or to the perceived realism of TVF [televised fiction] as a whole." We are inclined to agree and to extend this observation to include children as old as those in tenth grade.

In conclusion, two studies of children's perceptions of the realism of television families have produced remarkably similar results using children with similar demographic characteristics, similar television series, and virtually identical instruments. Results show the influence of both children's age, and hence knowledge and experience, and of television content characteristics on perceived realism judgments. They suggest that greater understanding of the development of judgments about the representativity, plausibility, or possibility of television content, as opposed to its literal reality, will come through careful concatenation of the type of content being judged, including its specificity/generality, its actual realism, and its familiarity to children, the media forms in which the content is presented, and the conceptualization of realism measured. The model we have proposed offers one such concatenation. It can be tested both by organizing extant findings into it and by carrying out new research derived from it.

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## Author Notes

1. We are grateful to the administrators, staff, teachers, and students of the 42 schools in which the research was conducted.

2. We appreciate the research assistance provided by 21 UCLA undergraduate and graduate students, most of whom helped with data collection and processing, and some with data analysis.

3. Because developmental and cross cultural research has shown that performance is best when materials and tasks are familiar and relevant (Cole & Means, 1981), we elected to have each child judge the realism of the two family series with which he or she was most familiar. To create family structure variables using all data from all subjects, we resorted to the ranking and classification system described in the methods and results. This led to having different series in the MTS and LTS groups at each grade, a different overall mix of series for each grade, and the same series represented in both the MTS and LTS groups. To see whether different results would be obtained if each series was in either the MTS or the LTS group but not both, a second set of analyses was conducted using a subsample of 600 children and one series for each child. Children were selected at each grade so that 100 had rated one of 9 series featuring an intact family with biological children and 100 had rated one of 23 series featuring families with less traditional structures. Further, they were chosen so as to maximize the number of different series in the MTS and LTS groups and to equalize the frequency with which the different series were represented in their condition. Because the pattern of results was quite similar to that for analyses using the entire sample, this second analysis will not be reported here. Other analyses exploring the possible effects of our ranking and classification system are reported in the body of the paper.

4. A second test of the effects of content characteristics on developmental patterns used each series separately in a 3 X 4 (Grade by Content Domain) ANOVA with repeated measures on the second factor. Grade differences and grade by content domain interactions were more often present and significant for the MTS than LTS series, more often for feelings and general realism than for demographics and actions, and, for general realism only, for MTS more than LTS series. Given the similarity of these findings to those reported for

the overall MANOVA for the six series combined, the specifics of the ANOVAs for each series separately are not reported.

5. The only two other significant findings from this MANOVA are as follows: a significant main effect for content domain, $F(3, 692) = 23.87$, $p = .0001$, with the order from most to least realistic being feelings, general realism, actions, and demographics, and a significant interaction between family structure and content domain, $F(3, 692) = 9.33$, $p = .0001$, with the differences in the perceived realism of more and less traditionally structured groups being small for feelings, somewhat larger for actions, large for general realism, and largest for demographics.

Table 1

Mean Traditionality of Family Structure for Series Chosen by Second, Sixth, and Tenth Graders as Their Two Most Frequently Viewed and Placed in Either the More (MTS) or Less (LTS) Traditionally Structured Group

| | | Traditionality of Family Structure | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Grade | | More Traditional (MTS) | Less Traditional (LTS) | Mean Traditionality |
| Second | M | $10.76_a$ | $22.33_b$ | $16.55_a$ |
| | SD | 7.37 | 9.26 | 7.10 |
| | n | 510 | 510 | 510 |
| Sixth | M | $7.46_a$ | $19.59_b$ | $13.52_b$ |
| | SD | 6.51 | 11.92 | 8.03 |
| | n | 610 | 610 | 610 |
| Tenth | M | $5.43_a$ | $14.95_b$ | $10.19_c$ |
| | SD | 4.68 | 11.18 | 6.96 |
| | n | 568 | 568 | 568 |
| All Grades | M | $7.78_a$ | $18.86_b$ | |
| | SD | 6.61 | 11.32 | |
| | n | 1688 | 1688 | |

Note: Larger numbers indicate less traditional family structure. Cells with different subscripts in rows of the main body of the table and in the marginal row and column differ at $p<.0001$.

Table 2

Mean Perceived Realism Judgments by Traditionality of Family Structure and Content Domain

| Content Domain | | More Traditional Structure (MTS) | Less Traditional Structure (LTS) | Both Structures Combined |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| General Realism | M | $2.56_a$ | $2.27_b$ | $2.42_a$ |
| | SD | 1.25 | 1.28 | 1.04 |
| | n | 1623 | 1623 | 1623 |
| Realism of Feelings | M | $2.53_a$ | $2.47_b$ | $2.50_b$ |
| | SD | 0.96 | 0.95 | 0.88 |
| | n | 1686 | 1686 | 1686 |
| Realism of Actions | M | $2.37_a$ | $2.28_b$ | $2.32_c$ |
| | SD | 1.00 | 1.00 | 0.89 |
| | n | 1686 | 1686 | 1686 |
| Realism of Demographics | M | $2.45_a$ | $2.18_b$ | $2.32_c$ |
| | SD | 0.79 | 0.80 | 0.69 |
| | n | 1685 | 1686 | 1686 |
| All Content Combined | M | $2.48_a$ | $2.30_b$ | |
| | SD | 0.77 | 0.77 | |
| | n | 1686 | 1686 | |

Note: Larger numbers indicate greater perceived realism, with 1.00 meaning 20% of real-life American families are like the television family and 3.00 meaning 60%. Lower n's than for overall total reflect missing data for some items. Cells with different subscripts in rows of the main body of the table and in the marginal row and column differ at $p<.0001$.

Table 3

Mean Perceived Realism Judgments by Content Domain and Grade

| Grade | | General Realism | Realism of Feelings | Realism of Actions | Realism of Demographics |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Second | M | $2.52_a$ | $2.74_b$ | $2.29_c$ | $2.37_c$ |
| | SD | 1.15 | 0.95 | 0.95 | 0.73 |
| | n | 506 | 509 | 509 | 509 |
| Sixth | M | $2.54_a$ | $2.42_b$ | $2.35_{bc}$ | $2.30_c$ |
| | SD | 1.04 | 0.88 | 0.91 | 0.75 |
| | n | 585 | 610 | 610 | 610 |
| Tenth | M | $2.14_a$ | $2.38_b$ | $2.33_b$ | $2.29_b$ |
| | SD | 0.87 | 0.75 | 0.79 | 0.57 |
| | n | 532 | 567 | 567 | 567 |

Note: Larger numbers indicate greater perceived realism, with 1.00 meaning 20% of real-life American families are like the television family and 3.00 meaning 60%. Lower n's than for overall total reflect missing data for some items. Cells in rows with different subscripts differ at $p<.0002$.

Table 4

Mean Perceived Realism Judgments by Traditionality of Family Structure and Grade

| Grade | | More Traditional (MTS) | Less Traditional (LTS) | All Series |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Second | M | $2.53_a$ | $2.43_b$ | $2.48_a$ |
| | SD | 0.81 | 0.84 | 0.75 |
| | n | 509 | 509 | 509 |
| Sixth | M | $2.52_a$ | $2.29_b$ | $2.40_a$ |
| | SD | 0.79 | 0.81 | 0.73 |
| | n | 610 | 610 | 610 |
| Tenth | M | $2.38_a$ | $2.21_b$ | $2.30_b$ |
| | SD | 0.69 | 0.66 | 0.60 |
| | n | 567 | 567 | 567 |

Note: Larger numbers indicate greater perceived realism, with 1.00 meaning 20% of real-life American families are like the television family and 3.00 meaning 60%. Cells with different subscripts in rows of the main body of the table and in the marginal column differ at $p<.0007$.

Table 5

Hierarchical Stepwise Regressions of Children's Perceived General Realism by Grade and Series

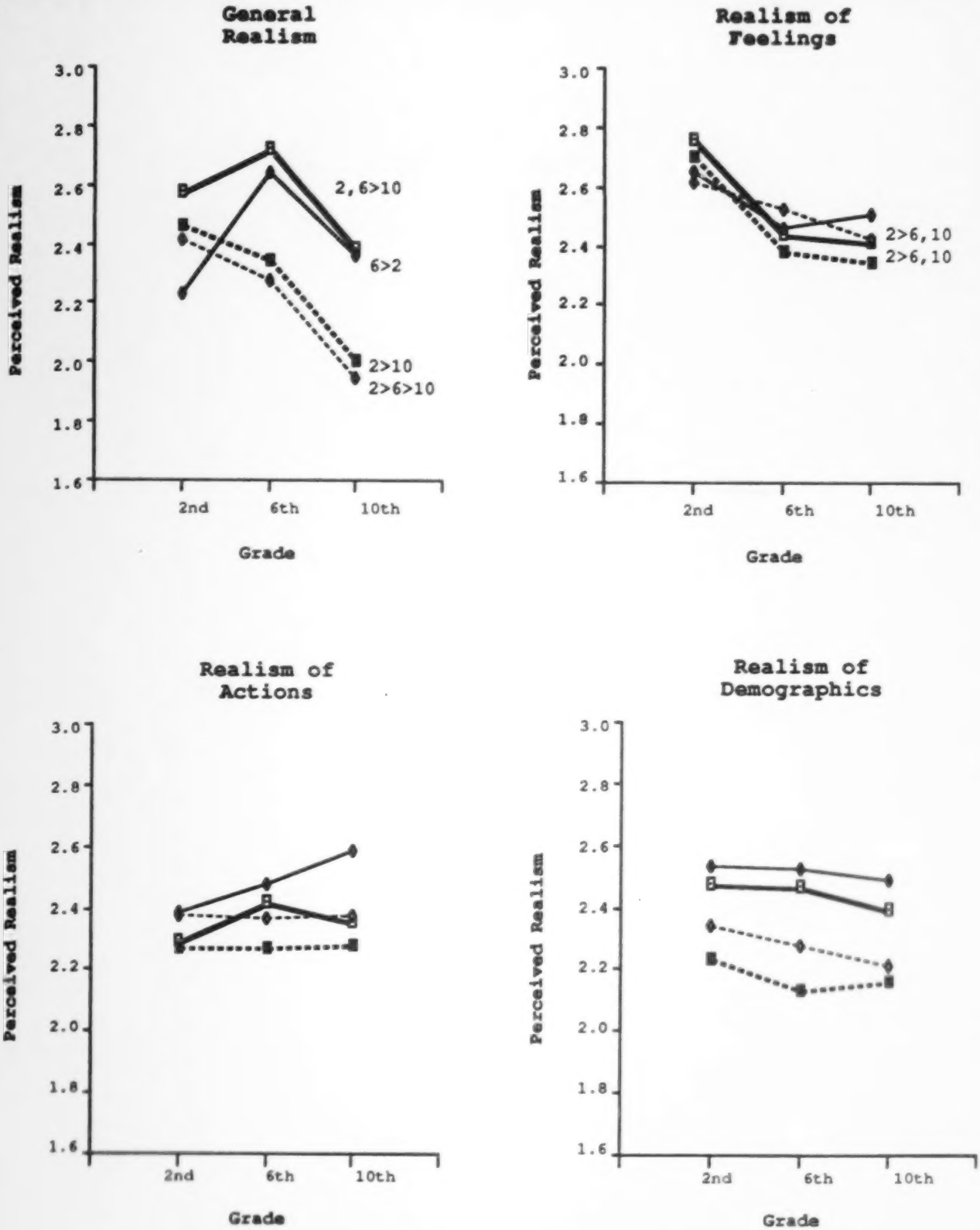
| | Second Grade | | | Sixth Grade | | | Tenth Grade | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Predictors in Order | Beta | $R^2$ Increase | Predictors in Order | Beta | $R^2$ Increase | Predictors in Order | Beta | $R^2$ Increase |
| First Series | Sex | -.37** | .01 | Sex | -.01 | .00 | Sex | -.09 | .01 |
| | Real-FeelAct | .39*** | .12 | Real-FeelAct | .58*** | .24 | Real-FeelAct | .48*** | .18 |
| | Real-Demog | .24** | .02 | Trad Rank | -.02*** | .01 | Real-Demog | .26*** | .03 |
| | Fam Conseq Beh | .52** | .01 | Middle Cl | .17* | .01 | Rel 7 | -.77* | .00 |
| | | | | Rel 11 | .58* | .01 | Fam Conseq Beh | .46* | .01 |
| | | | | Real-Demog | .12[a] | .00 | Trad Rank | -.01[a] | .00 |
| | | | | | | | Rel 11 | -.51[a] | .00 |
| Model | $F(4,501) = 23.78***$, $R^2 = .16$ | | | $F(6,575) = 36.33***$, $R^2 = .27$ | | | $F(7,524) = 24.84***$, $R^2 = .25$ | | |
| Second Series | Sex | -.09 | .00 | Sex | -.08 | .01 | Sex | -.11 | .01 |
| | Real-Demog | .40*** | .14 | Real-FeelAct | .48*** | .21 | Real-Demog | .43*** | .26 |
| | Real-FeelAct | .37*** | .04 | Fam Conseq Exp | .93** | .03 | Real-FeelAct | .43*** | .05 |
| | Fam Conseq Exp | .52* | .01 | Rel 11 | -.70* | .01 | Liv Qtr | .15*** | .02 |
| | | | | Real-Demog | .16* | .01 | Middle Cl | .23** | .01 |
| Model | $F(4,501) = 27.99***$, $R^2 = .18$ | | | $F(5,575) = 41.11***$, $R^2 = .26$ | | | $F(5,523) = 57.37***$, $R^2 = .35$ | | |

| | |
|---|---|
| Sex | 0 = girl, 1 = boy |
| Real-FeelAct | Perceived realism of feelings & actions |
| Real-Demog | Perceived realism of demographics |
| Rel 7 | Relevance of story to 7-year-olds |
| Rel 11 | Relevance of story to 11-year-olds |
| Fam Conseq Exp | Familiar consequences for emotional expression |
| Fam Conseq Beh | Familiar consequences for behavior after emotional expression |
| Middle Cl | Middle-class-ness of family |
| Trad Rank | Traditionality rank of family structure (1 = most traditional) |
| Liv Qtr | Middle-class-ness of family's living quarters |

| | |
|---|---|
| [a] | $p<.15$ |
| * | $p<.05$ |
| ** | $p<.01$ |
| *** | $p<.001$ |

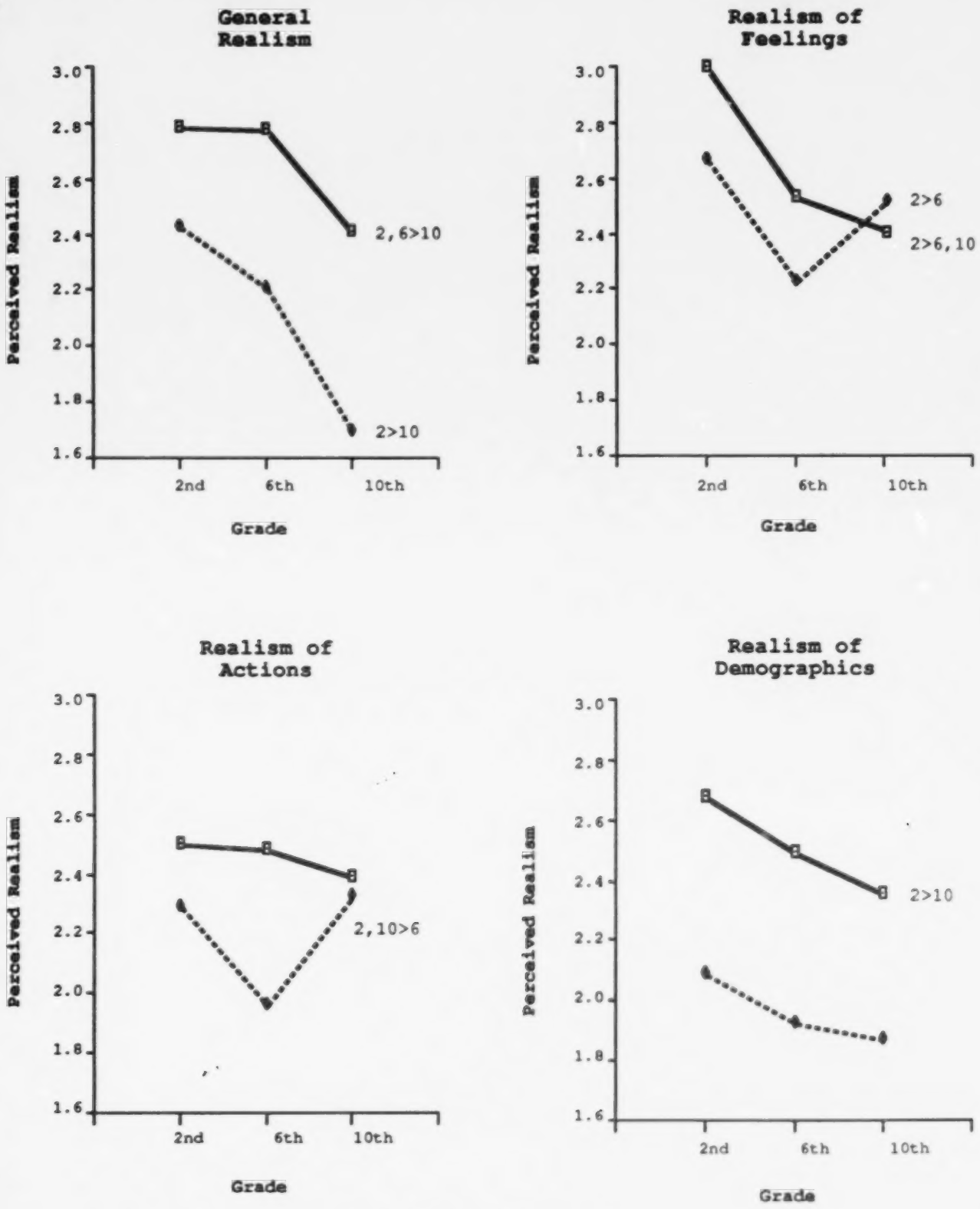
## Figure Caption

Figure 1. Perceived realism of all family series by content domain, traditionality of family structure, and grade for current study and previous study. Significant grade differences within traditionality of structure and content domain are indicated on each graph. Perceived realism scores of 2.00 and 3.00 indicate that 40% and 60% respectively of American families are like the television family.


General Realism
Perceived Realism
3.0
2.8
2.6
2.4
2.2
2.0
1.8
1.6
2nd
6th
10th
Grade
2,6>10
6>2
2>10
2>6>10
Realism of Feelings
2>6,10
2>6,10
Realism of Actions
Realism of Demographics
More Traditional Structure, Previous Study
More Traditional Structure, This Study
Less Traditional Structure, Previous Study
Less Traditional Structure, This Study

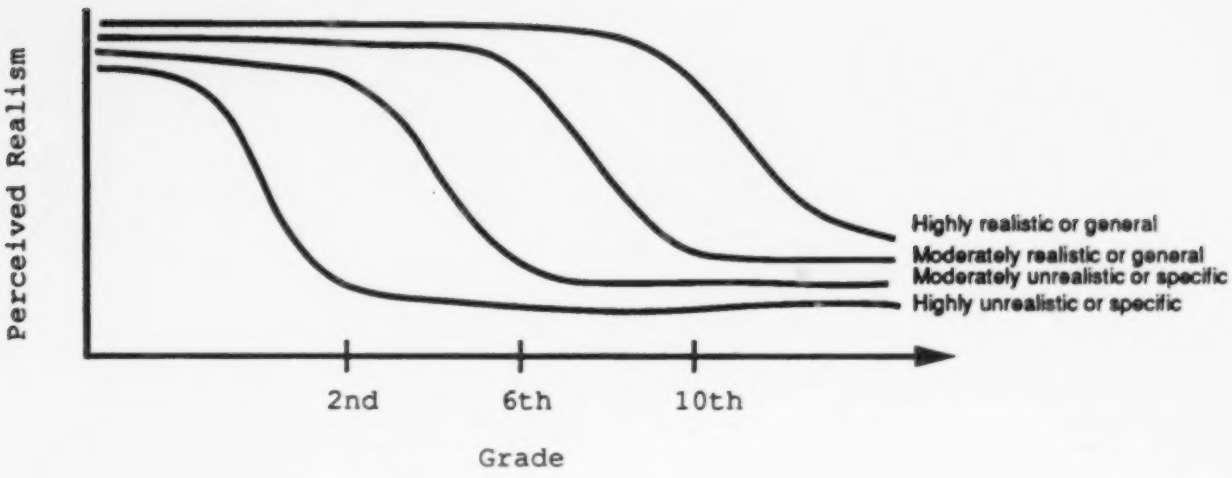
## Figure Caption

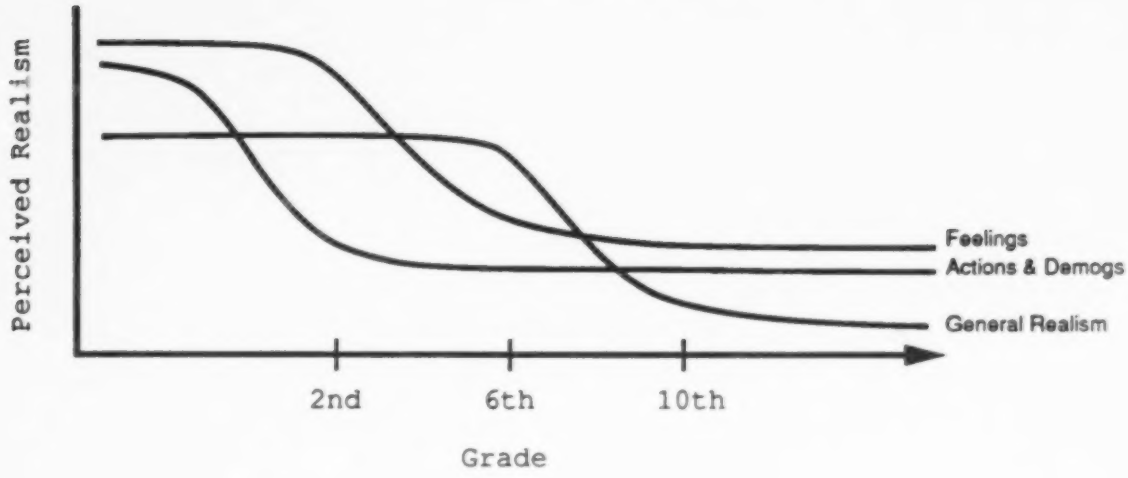
Figure 2. Perceived realism of six family series by content domain, traditionality of family structure, and grade. Significant grade differences within traditionality of structure and content domain are indicated on each graph. Perceived realism scores of 2.00 and 3.00 indicate that 40% and 60% respectively of American families are like the television family.

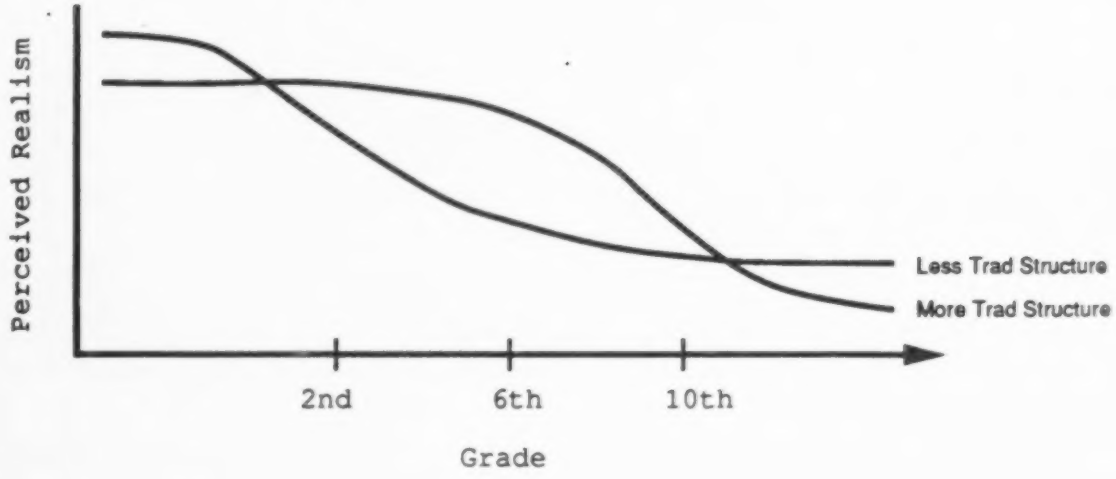

General Realism
Perceived Realism
3.0
2.8
2.6
2.4
2.2
2.0
1.8
1.6
2nd
6th
10th
Grade
2,6>10
2>10
Realism of Feelings
2>6
2>6,10
Realism of Actions
2,10>6
Realism of Demographics
2>10
More Traditional Structure
Less Traditional Structure

## Figure Caption

Figure 3. Hypothetical developmental patterns for the perceived realism of television content that is more and less general and more and less representative of everyday life (top), obtained developmental patterns for perceived realism of more and less general content (middle), and obtained developmental patterns for perceived realism of more and less representative content (bottom)


Perceived Realism
Highly realistic or general
Moderately realistic or general
Moderately unrealistic or specific
Highly unrealistic or specific
2nd
6th
10th
Grade


Perceived Realism
Feelings
Actions & Demogs
General Realism
2nd
6th
10th
Grade


Perceived Realism
Less Trad Structure
More Trad Structure
2nd
6th
10th
Grade